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ABSTRACT

Established in 1968, The European Documentation and Information System for Education (EUDISED) has passed through several developmental stages. Initially, early attempts to apply computer techniques to educational documentation and information were not coordinated between European countries. Interest in the American ERIC system resulted in two studies. The first study (1970) concerned the problems of using a common thesaurus of descriptors and a common format. The second study (1971) designed a proposed system. In 1974, the multilingual EUDISED Thesaurus was published and field experiments began to test the proposed system. In the primary experiment twelve national agencies completed a common worksheet on selected R & D projects in their countries, and the results were published in the EUDISED R & D Bulletin. This and other experiments led to increased standardization between countries regarding indexing, abstracting, and dissemination. Present concerns are for the maintenance of a self-sustaining system; the expansion of computer access to all agencies; and the access to ERIC material and data from various international organizations. (DAG)

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THE EUDISED PROJECT

Present situation, problems and prospects

1. EUDISED stands for EUropean Documentation and Information System for EDucation. The project was established in 1968/69 by the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CCC) within which 21 states parties to the European Cultural Convention co-operate in the framework of the Council of Europe. The project, after having passed through its preparatory stages, is now in its experimental stage. During this stage a number of field tests are being carried out in co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Commission of the European Communities to examine further the possibilities for creating a computer-based system for the exchange of educational information between national agencies.

FIRST STAGE - FEASIBILITY STUDIES

2. When the CCC in September 1968 authorised the Council of Europe's Secretariat to convene in 1969 experts to study the application of computer techniques to educational documentation and information, the main reason for this decision was that in a number of countries - France, Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom - national agencies had already begun to experiment with such techniques. It was felt necessary to co-ordinate these experiments and thus to prevent the use of different software and hardware leading to incompatibility of output which would be detrimental to information exchange. At the same time, the American ERIC system began to arouse considerable interest in Europe, and it was generally held that it would be desirable to create a similar system in the Western European countries.

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3. The working party of experts set up under the chairmanship of Professor E. Egger, Geneva, visited the most advanced national institutions in this field in member states and on the basis of this evidence published a report on the application of computer techniques to educational documentation and information. The author of the report was Mr. K. Spangenberg, Berlin. Two further volumes contained national reports and technical studies respectively (see bibliographical references, document DECS/Doc (76) 2).

The report was submitted in 1970 to the Committee for Educational Documentation and Information on which the 21 member governments are represented by their delegated experts. The Committee decided that the matter should be pursued further and that in particular the problems of using a common thesaurus of descriptors and a common format for recording educational data and materials should be studied in greater detail.

4. Thus, a second working party chaired by Mr. J. Viet, Paris, was created to collect evidence from national and international sources and examine these problems. Its report, written by the Chairman and published in 1971, contained a general design for the proposed system and was complemented by a volume of technical studies. The Committee at its 1971 annual meeting adopted in principle the proposed system design and set up two groups of experts, one to elaborate the EUDISED thesaurus and the other to prepare the EUDISED standards and format.

SECOND STAGE - ELABORATION OF INSTRUMENTS

5. Both groups of experts completed their work in 1973. The computer processed multilingual EUDISED Thesaurus was edited by Mr Viet and published in English, French and German in early 1974 by Mouton, Paris and The Hague. It contains some 2,600 descriptors, listed both systematically under 21 facets and alphabetically. Within the facets each descriptor is given in either English, French or German (according to the language version), followed by its equivalent in the other two languages. Thus, for the first time an agreed multilingual documentation language for education became available in Europe. After the publication of the three first thesaurus versions, national authorities asked the Council of Europe for support in preparing versions in their own languages. Thus a Spanish version will shortly be published by Mouton, and a Dutch version is at present being computer processed. These versions contain the EUDISED descriptors in Spanish or Dutch respectively followed by the French and English equivalents. Furthermore, the Brazilian Education Ministry prepared and published in 1974 a Portuguese-English version of the EUDISED Thesaurus for use in its country.

6. The report of the other group of experts chaired by Mr. R. Coward, London, was published under the title "EUDISED Standards, Format, Character Representation 1973". It contains recommendations for adopting common transmission standards, bibliography standards, code standards and format implementation standards. Furthermore, it outlines the main aspects of the network development which would be needed for the envisaged information exchange between agencies applying computer techniques.

THIRD STAGE - FIELD EXPERIMENTS

7. With the availability of these two instruments it became possible to test the proposed system by processing samples of data from various educational fields. The Committee for Educational Documentation and Information recommended in 1974 that the first experiment be carried out in the field of educational research and development. In this field a national infrastructure existed already. Agencies in member states had in 1968 and 1970 co-operated in producing the European surveys of educational research published by the Council of Europe and had, since 1971, prepared and published national surveys (see for bibliography document DECS/Rech (75) 58). Thus twelve national agencies were asked to select R & D projects in their countries and to complete for each of them a common worksheet. Some 220 worksheets on ongoing and completed R & D projects were obtained and processed by the British Library under contract to the Council of Europe. The printouts were published in the 1975 experimental issue of the EUDISED R & D BULLETIN.

8. At the recommendation of the Committee two similar experiments are at present being carried out, the first under the supervision of Mr. L. A. Gilbert, London, in the field of information exchange on audio-visual media and the second, under the supervision of Mr. Viet, in the field of abstracting educational articles in scientific periodicals. Special worksheets were elaborated for both fields. National agencies were asked to select samples of items and report on them on the worksheets which will again be processed by the British Library. Each experiment will comprise some 250-300 items from five countries. The printouts will be published in the course of 1976 in experimental bulletins- the EUDISED-AV BULLETIN for the audio-visual material and the EUDISED-EP BULLETIN for the educational periodicals.

9. The technical problems of co-operation in these experiments, in particular as regards standards and format, are at present being further investigated by a working party under the chairmanship of Mr. J. E. Linford, London.

FOURTH STAGE - GENERALISATION OF EXPERIMENTS

10. At a meeting of the Bureau of the Committee for Educational Documentation and Information with the editors of national surveys of educational research which was held at the invitation of the Commission of the European Communities in Luxembourg in November 1975, it was decided to propose to member governments to generalise the EUDISED R & D experiment. The procedure envisaged in 1976 is as follows:

- All national agencies participating in the project will complete a EUDISED R & D worksheet for each national R & D project which they wish to enter into the common EUDISED data base. The multilingual EUDISED Thesaurus will be used for indexing. The abstracts concerning the projects may be written in any language for which a thesaurus version exists. The worksheets will be sent to the British Library which, under contract to the Council of Europe, will carry out the processing. The provisional printouts will be sent back to the national agency concerned for checking.

- The final printouts will be made available to all national agencies from which the data were forthcoming and will serve for offset printing of current awareness lists or annual surveys in the countries concerned. A copy of the final printouts will also be sent to the Council of Europe for publication in the form of EUDISED R & D BULLETINS. These will be distributed by the national agencies free of charge in 1976 and will from 1977 onwards be published on a commercial basis.

Provided that the results of the EUDISED-AV and -EP experiments meet with sufficient interest and support in member states, a similar generalisation could be envisaged in the years to come.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

11. A computer-based information system justifies its creation if and when the information needs on the part of its customers make it self-sustaining. As far as scientific and technological information is concerned, we know that most of the existing systems have stood this test. But what of information systems in the social sciences and especially in education ? We know from the experience with ERIC that it is used firstly by postgraduate students, secondly by school and university administrators, and thirdly by researchers and teachers; its clientele has sufficed to make it self-sustaining. We also know that ERIC has had a considerable impact on the development and improvement of

education at all levels in the USA. At present, we can only guess how EUDISED will fare with its potential clientele in Europe: the proof of a new product is in its consumption.

12. Another problem concerns the network development. Some of the national agencies which co-operate in EUDISED are already fully computer-based, and most of the remaining agencies expect to obtain computer access this year or in the near future. A computerised agency should not be forced to fill out manually worksheets which are then processed by another computer at a central agency. On the contrary, such national agencies should exchange their tapes among themselves and with the central agency. This is not yet possible: the required software has still to be produced. For this reason a detailed study of these problems in the context of EUDISED has recently been commissioned by the European Communities.

13. Finally, EUDISED has reached an intermediate stage which cannot be regarded as fully satisfactory. A microfiche and hard-copy service needs to be established. The access to ERIC material and data from various international organisations is a further problem which must be solved in the future. The full potentiality of the system will only be achieved when all participating agencies possess and use copies of all tapes generated within the network. This will make it possible to establish in each country services to disseminate information according to the individual needs of all those who are responsible for and interested in the improvement of education in Europe.